

SLIM - *Comment*

Tackling Worklessness and the Role of Local Authorities - Review

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The Interim Report of Stephen Houghton's Tackling Worklessness Review is now out and contains the Review team's current thinking on how successful multi-agency and cross-sector local partnerships can best tackle worklessness in their communities. The report is entitled:

Tackling Worklessness: A Review of the contribution and role of local authorities and partnerships - Interim Report.

The independent review proposes that Councils should be given greater responsibility for co-ordinating efforts to tackle rising unemployment in their local areas. It recommends that upper tier councils be responsible for conducting analyses of the causes of worklessness in their local communities, as part of the Government's proposals for local authorities to undertake economic assessments.

It follows hot-on-the heels of the Machinery of Government changes in the Sub-National Review (a SLIM-Comment on which has been circulated with this edition).

The consultation on the review team's interim report has started and the closing date for responses is 9 January 2009. The review was commissioned by Local Government Minister John Healey and former Employment Minister, Stephen Timms, on 28 May 2008.

I hope you find this brief SLIM-*Comment* useful.

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The Details

In its interim report published for consultation the review team, chaired by Cllr Stephen Houghton of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, recommends that upper tier councils be responsible for conducting analyses of the causes of worklessness in their local communities, as part of the Government's proposals for local authorities to undertake economic assessments.

Building on the priority given to worklessness in Local and Multi-Area Agreements, councils and partnerships who want to go further on worklessness would be able to agree Work and Skills Plans with Government, outlining how worklessness would be addressed, and gaining additional freedoms and resources in return.

These councils would benefit from a dedicated, long-term Work and Skills Budget, which would be allocated for up to six years to help them meet targets, agreed with ministers, to improve the local economy. This could include existing funding allocated to worklessness, such as Working Neighbourhoods Fund and other local resources, as well as additional money from mainstream employment programmes.

The report also proposes that the Government should require public sector employers in deprived areas to do more to support their local communities. This includes offering apprenticeship places, advertising all vacancies with Jobcentre Plus offices and encouraging all bidders for contracts and local suppliers to provide job opportunities to local people.

Chairman of the review team, Cllr Stephen Houghton, Leader of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, said:

Since the launch of our review, the global economy has suffered a significant downturn - and the UK economy is not immune to this. It makes our work even more important than ever. As leader of a council where worklessness is a significant issue, I know how difficult it can be for local communities. And our council, like others, is well-placed to know what the economic challenges are and how they can be addressed.

That's why we recommend an increased role for councils, producing assessments of the causes of worklessness in their area, and working with partners, including with other councils, on the solutions.

We are proposing a new framework that challenges and enables partners to come together locally and to better coordinate their resources and efforts to address the particular problems faced in their area. Worklessness is not an issue that can be solved in isolation and the causes and solutions vary from place to place; it will require all partners to work more closely, to be more flexible, to work better and to work smarter.

This, combined with a coordinated, focused approach from central Government, will make a real difference, keeping people in jobs where possible, and helping those who have been long-term unemployed.

At this difficult economic time, this is particularly important.

Ministers commissioned the review to examine how £1.5bn Working Neighbourhoods Funding is being used, and to consider what more central Government can do to support councils and their partners to tackle worklessness in their local areas.

The review team also has recommendations for central Government. The report recommends that responsibility and resource for helping long-term benefit claimants, coordinating delivery of employment and skills services and for promoting self-employment and enterprise are devolved to local strategic partnerships. The report recommends that local authorities and their partnerships should be a new channel through which additional support can be offered and expanded over the coming period.

A new national task force should also be established, to report to the National Economic Council and to drive forward measures to help tackle worklessness in those areas. And a new National Challenge Fund should be available to help create temporary jobs designed to help the community, local environment and disadvantaged people.

Link

Tackling Worklessness: A Review of the contribution and role of local authorities and partnerships - Interim Report

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/tacklingworklessnessinterim>



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